



→ THE BANDIT ZINE ←

PRESENTS

# GENDER STORIES



we're all just human



PRESENTS

# GENDER STORIES

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## GENDER STORIES INTRO:

Guys have dicks and gals have clits and that's how it is, right? Hardly. Sex and gender are NOT the same thing, and in fact, it's much more complicated than that. So what's the difference between sex and gender? Sex often refers to the anatomical or physical differences -- hormones, reproductive systems, and whatnot. Whereas, gender is about a person's behavior or expression, such as how it's expected of females to wear their hair long and play with dolls or of males to wear their hair short and play sports. First off, there aren't two sexes. According to Anne Fausto-Sterling, one out of 1,000 newborns are born with intersex conditions (i.e. varying hormone differences, androgynous genitalia) and by taking those intersex conditions into account, there's actually seven different sexes! Moreover, cultures across the world reject the gender binary of male/female and fully embrace gender fluidity or recognize genders outside of that dichotomy. So why does the West insist that there's only two sexes and two genders? Why have we been taught that those with a vagina are women and those with a penis are men?

While we could go into a lengthy explanation on the how or why, we'd rather focus on the people who are directly impacted and affected by this binary system. Some of us don't identify with the sex we've been assigned with at birth. Some of us have grown up feeling as if we were 'trapped in the wrong body' or as if we don't really fully relate with femininity or masculinity; for others, we feel masculine some days and feminine others. And then there's others who completely reject the notion of masculinity and femininity, and view gender as a sphere-- something that changes, evolves, and shouldn't be defined by myopic standards. All of those expressions of gender are valid. Why? Because we're human. This zine is dedicated to those who fall outside the cisgender norm, and all those who struggle with their gender identity/expression. More importantly, this zine is a celebration of all trans\*/gender non-conforming/genderfluid/genderqueer folk because you're all beautiful!

### .TRIGGER WARNING.

This zine contains several accounts of the following: gender/body dysmorphia, violence directed towards trans\* folks, transphobia, cissexism, sexual violence, etc. Please practice self-care throughout reading this issue!

# THE BANDIT'S GUIDE TO TRANS\* TERMS

**Transgender:** An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. The term may include but is not limited to: transsexuals, cross-dressers, and other gender-variant people. Transgender people may identify as female-to-male (FTM) or male-to-female (MTF). Use the descriptive term (transgender, transsexual, cross-dresser, FTM or MTF) preferred by the individual. Transgender people may or may not choose to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically.

**Transsexual (Transexual):** An older term which originated in the medical and psychological communities. Many transgender people prefer the term "transgender" to "transsexual." Some transsexual people still prefer to use the term to describe themselves. However, unlike transgender, transsexual is not an umbrella term, and many transgender people do not identify as transsexual. It is best to ask which term an individual prefers.

**Gender Non-conforming:** A term for individuals whose gender expression is different from the societal expectations based on their assigned sex at birth. Gender Non-conforming individuals may or may not pursue any physical changes, such as hormonal or surgical interventions. Gender non-conforming individuals may or may not identify as trans, male or female.

**Genderqueer:** A term used by some individuals who identify as between genders, or as neither man nor woman. Genderqueer identity may be seen as an identity under the gender non-conforming umbrella. Genderqueer individuals may or may not pursue any physical changes, such as hormonal or surgical intervention. Genderqueer individuals may or may not identify as trans.

**Transition:** Altering one's birth sex is not a one-step procedure; it is a complex process that occurs over a long period of time. Transition includes some or all of the following cultural, legal and medical adjustments: telling one's family, friends, and/or co-workers; changing one's name and/or sex on legal documents; hormone therapy; and possibly (though not always) some form of surgical alteration.

**Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS):** Refers to surgical alteration, and is only one small part of transition (see Transition above). Preferred term to "sex change operation." Not all transgender people choose to or can afford to have SRS. Journalists should avoid overemphasizing the importance of SRS to the transition process.

**Cross-Dressing:** To occasionally wear clothes traditionally associated with people of the other sex. Cross-dressers are usually comfortable with the sex they were assigned at birth and do not wish to change it. "Cross-dresser" should NOT be used to describe someone who has transitioned to live full-time as the other sex, or who intends to do so in the future. Cross-dressing is a form of gender expression and is not necessarily tied to erotic activity. Cross-dressing is not indicative of sexual orientation.

**Gender Identity Disorder (GID):** A controversial DSM-IV diagnosis given to transgender and other gender-variant people. Because it labels people as "disordered," Gender Identity Disorder is often considered offensive. The diagnosis is frequently given to children who don't conform to expected gender norms in terms of dress, play or behavior. Such children are often subjected to intense psychotherapy, behavior modification and/or institutionalization. Replaces the outdated term "gender dysphoria."

## AVOID THESE TERMS:

**Problematic:** "transgenders," "a transgender"

**Preferred:** "transgender people," "a transgender person"

Transgender should be used as an adjective, not as a noun. Do not say, "Tony is a transgender," or "The parade included many transgenders." Instead say, "Tony is a transgender person," or "The parade included many transgender people."

**Problematic:** "transgendered"

**Preferred:** "transgender"

The word transgender never needs the extraneous "ed" at the end of the word. In fact, such a construction is grammatically incorrect. Only verbs can be transformed into participles by adding "-ed" to the end of the word, and transgender is an adjective, not a verb.

**Problematic:** "sex change," "pre-operative," "post-operative"

**Preferred:** "transition"

Referring to a sex change operation, or using terms such as pre- or post-operative, inaccurately suggests that one must have surgery in order to truly change one's sex.

**Problematic:** "hermaphrodite"

**Preferred:** "intersex person"

The word "hermaphrodite" is an outdated, stigmatizing and misleading word, usually used to sensationalize intersex people.

## DEFAMATORY TERMS:

**Defamatory:** "deceptive," "fooling," "pretending," "posing," or "masquerading"

Gender identity is an integral part of a person's identity. Please do not characterize transgender people as "deceptive," as "fooling" other people, or as "pretending" to be, "posing" or "masquerading" as a man or a woman. Such descriptions are extremely insulting.

**Defamatory:** "she-male," "he-she," "it," "trannie," "tranny," "gender-bender," "transvestite"

These words only serve to dehumanize transgender people and should not be used.



# ♂ MAKE SURE TO USE THE CORRECT PRONOUN ♀

MASCULINE TRADITIONAL	HE	HIM	HIS	HIS	HIMSELF
FEMININE TRADITIONAL	SHE	HER	HER	HERS	HERSELF
GENDER NEUTRAL (THEY-SINGULAR)	THEY	THEM	THEIR	THEIRS	THEMSELF
GENDER NEUTRAL (ZE)	ZE ("zee")	HIR ("here")	HIR ("here")	HIRS ("here's")	H/IRSELF ("here-self")

i know that it's early  
and i know that you hate  
when i wake you up,  
but my lips defied my mind  
and found the back of your neck.

because every time you call me "sir",  
and tell me how handsome i look in a tie,  
my bound chest swells with pride.

and when i stare at my peter pan reflection  
in your deep green eyes  
and tell you how i used to strut  
around my grandmother's house, shirtless,  
my peach fuzz face soaked in aftershave,  
insisting on being called Mark  
at the ripe age of six,  
you smile back at me.

when you run your perfectly  
manicured nails across my bare body,  
and trace the barely-there happy trail,  
grabbing my skin tight boxer briefs there,  
and tell me that you want to suck me off,  
anticipation grips every muscle in my body.

you make me want to forget the nights  
of coke and Coke and rum  
that made me forget who i was.  
because when the smell of your perfume  
sticks to my white tee and peaks my  
gender-fucked sense of smell  
on that inter borough drive home,  
i get turned on all over again  
and nothing has ever felt so right.

so i know that it's early,  
and i know that you hate  
when i wake you up with  
the shyest kisses on the back of your neck,  
but the sky's a dreamy shade of blue  
and i want you to make me feel again.

SHADE OF  
BLUE.  
BY CAI

# GENDERQUEER BLUES

BY JOI DUPLER

I'm genderqueer and my pronouns are 'they/their/them'. Although I've been identifying this way for a long time, many people (even those closest to me) refuse to acknowledge my identity, continue to use improper pronouns and completely misgender me. When I correct them, they say, "It's too difficult to remember that" or "That's confusing" or the infamous, "That's improper grammar."

How do I explain to my cis-friends or loved ones that using the wrong pronouns or referring to me as lady, girl, woman, or whatever other erasing/dismissive shit is not only disrespectful and oppressive but also really mean and fucked up to do to someone you care about?

Normally, I try to use "logic and reason" to break it down for people, but sometimes I just want to scream the following:

"HEY! You don't know what's it's like to be afraid when dudebros stare at you and call you a 'he/she' or ask, 'What are you anyway, dyke?'" and then threaten you on top of the rude, snide comments. You probably don't know what it's like walking down the street alone or going to some heteronormative bar, being hyper-aware of your tie/slacks/other androgynous attire because you can feel the stares, whispers, and rudeness radiating towards you.

Most likely, you don't know what it's like when people try to police and punish your gender expression, like, "WHY DON'T YOU EVER WEAR MAKEUP?" or, "YOU'D BE PRETTY IF YOU GREW YOUR HAIR OUT" or, "WHY DO YOU WANNA LOOK LIKE A BOY?" and "WHY DO

YOU HAVE BODY HAIR? EW, GROSS"

I'm assuming you don't know what's it's like to have spent most of your life trying to fit into this rigid gender role/femininity box, feeling strange, awkward, and sad because you aren't like everyone else. What about gender dysphoria? Do you ever shed tears over the fact that you can't conceal your large breasts and curvy hips? Do you ever not leave the house that day because you know that everyone will 'ma'am' you that day or stare at your chest?

It took me twenty-four years to be comfortable in my own skin and my gender identity/expression (I still have my moments). TWENTY-FOUR YEARS. And you totally belittled that struggle and pain in twenty seconds!"

I need a safe space. I mean, on one hand, I recognize the importance of meeting people of where they are at and believing people can grow, but damn, self-care. What do I do? I'm sick of correcting people and having to give my life story of how I came to be genderqueer, defining it/ breaking it down for people, or defending it from the infamous, "But you have vagina, doesn't that make you female?"

WHY CAN'T WE JUST BE FRIENDS AND YOU JUST USE THE RIGHT PRONOUNS AND NOT BE DISMISSIVE, BECAUSE I AM COOL AND YOU CARE ABOUT ME AND JUST LEAVE IT THERE? ALSO, WIKIPEDIA GENDERQUEER IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT IT MEANS BECAUSE IT IS NOT MY RESPONSIBILITY TO TEACH YOU OR ELABORATE. BE A GOOD ALLY, BUT ABOVE ALL, BE A GOOD FRIEND!



# GENDER BY Q

I stopped answering  
certain questions on forms.

They forget the letter  
Q.

I don't get F's.  
It's rare to see me in skirts.

I am both and neither.  
All inclusive.  
Breaking binaries.  
Go ask Judith Butler.

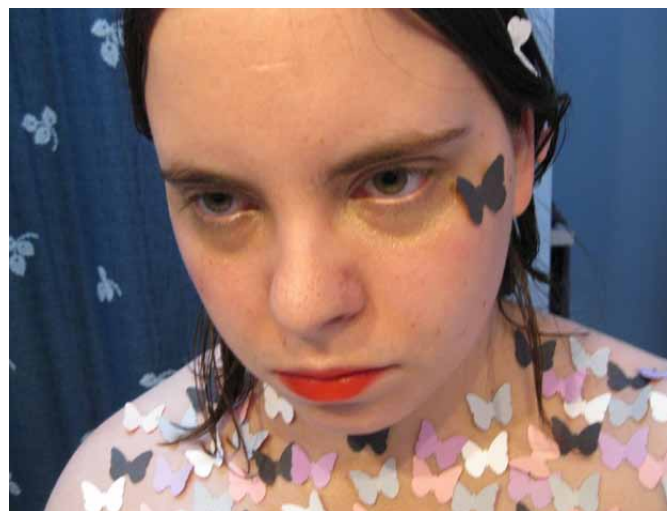
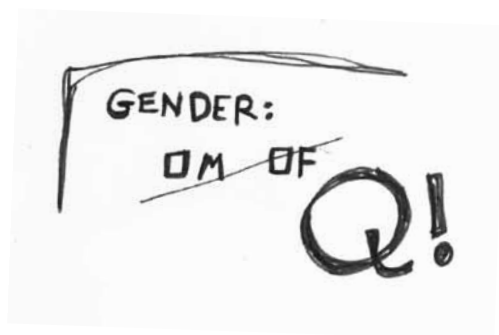
# BECOMING Q-BY Q

Question quandary queer,  
Sounds like 9 in Japanese (kyu).  
I'm not expecting to make sense  
to anyone.

Sounds like the beginning of cute  
which I tell the man I call princess,  
"I'll stop being cute when water stops being wet."

I never thought, I am a girl,  
I should be a boy,  
or I heart pink.

Legos, action figures  
lions, teddy bears  
puzzle pieces  
abominable creations  
of my choosing.



## BY CHRISSY COLLIGAN

My name is Chrissy Colligan, I identify as agender and my preferred pronouns are xe/xem/xyr/xemself. Sometimes I like to try to look 'femme' and put on makeup like lipstick. This in no way, shape, or form makes me less non-binary. And then there's my upper lip facial hair. The fact that I don't bleach it or get it in any way waxed or removed, doesn't make me any less 'femme' when I want to be perceived as 'feminine'. From November 2011 to November 2012 there have been 265 reported murders of Trans\*people. For Transgender Day of Remembrance I decided to commemorate and in a way mourn for these people that I have never met by making punch out butterflies from paper. I used the colors blue, pink, and white from the Transgender pride flag. I also used purple, a color usually correlated with nobility and strength. And then black for mourning. A little after making the butterflies I decided to do a kind of personal photo shoot. I wasn't even able to get all of the butterflies on me. I used a regular glue stick to glue them on.





BY GOOSE BALDWIN

# UNTITLED

BY ELIJAH

At age 5, gender meant I would drag my mother to the boys' section to get clothes that I liked.

At age 9, gender meant a self-talk in the mirror; the beginning of my denying dialogue, a desperate attempt to convince myself that girls have boobs and I am a girl, this confusion must stop, I shall have breasts and get over it, close this chapter, silence my instincts.

At age 12, gender meant wishing I could become my best friend's first boyfriend. So much for the closed chapter.

At some age, gender meant wondering if the soft round bit featuring a tiny hole on its tip was the penis that should have grown out, but somehow decided to shied away, remaining inside me.

At age 19, gender was the inexplicable, yet familiar, desire to escape everything and everyone so I could start a new life somewhere new and finally let myself out.

Never mind that I always avoided to look at specific parts of my body in the mirror.

Never mind that I felt so alone and dead, after muting my truths, denying their mere existence.

Today, at age 28, I finally identify as a transmasculine queer with a cunt, and gender means I can be whoever I want to be, even if it makes me invisible to some. Today, I finally decided to see myself and embrace my truths and I refuse to blindly navigate in my fears.



# SHE: THE ONE WHO ALWAYS WAS — BY BLOOD RED PAINT

What she envisioned to embody and  
(was)  
Without restriction or lust for simple formality  
Was the corset over a dress -  
So tightly and definitely curved  
A knowledge so actual and physical, but  
(denied)  
No need for makeup - but a certain want  
Ballet slipper and high heel envy  
To have long, fine, satin hair  
Without the threat of a slit  
A razor to push her back -  
Back into vomit inducing  
(dreams)  
A lion-clawed dresser  
Full of skirts and dainty blouses  
No more or less than the norm  
The freakish need in others  
To rip out dangling earrings  
No blessed bliss, but a desire there-  
(of)  
No methods, practices, or habits  
Not a change to something else  
What she truly was  
Her as a person - A human  
(being)  
One beautiful girl  
What she had always been  
But never could be  
Was a girl



# BORDER TOWNS

BY DEANN EMMET

She is not a man-  
yet she moves into my hand  
like she's trying to soak up some of my woman.  
I tell her she is beautiful-  
she shrugs this off,  
wraps her hair around Adam's apple,  
curls herself small into my arms.  
She is jack in the box,  
hiding springs to blend in,  
not wanting to startle me.  
I cannot know her by winding her up.  
I adjust my gestures, touch her unique,  
maneuver around foreign territory.  
There is a border-town between countries  
where she tells me we are just alike,  
where we are all merely skeleton wrapped in soft tissue,  
where identities intertwine-  
this place on her body is the physical manifestation of Spanglish.  
She lives in a border-town between sand  
and where tide drops off into abyss.  
Her endocrine system is a seal's refusal to transition into fish,  
evolution's way of keeping her mammal,  
partially submerged, unable to live on land or in water.  
She is mermaid, wanting nothing more  
than to spread fins into x-chromosome legs.  
I would go the rest of my life with foreign between mine  
if it meant she could feel like herself for once.  
I would trade my legs for fins, my lungs for gills,  
if I could build a border-town between humans,  
where apples have no need to be hidden,  
where every body is beautiful  
in any combination of languages.



# A NOTE ABOUT GENDER LABELS

BY CAMILLE BRICKSON

I have a uterus:

a hormone-responsive reproductive sex organ  
that could nurture a fetus nestled in ruby warm  
nutritious insides  
while nearby two ovaries secretly stand by  
pumping estrogen and progesterone  
providing eggs as consistently  
as pre-school pick ups.

I also have moon quarter periods keeping time with my bloodwalls,  
until it feels like someone has reached into my uterus  
grabbed what they could  
and flung it to the wall.  
pain that makes you stretch like dried leather  
basking in sunburn kneed salt floors.  
it matches my tomato spit  
each month, i travel  
red light districts  
whipping out sonatas screeches before I find relief through popped  
meds  
dosed  
with a shot of reassurance from my mother,  
that "it's sometimes hard to be a woman."

I could produce your children.  
fertilize tiny fetuses inside me  
strut my fertile stuff and wait for mates  
to spurt sperm into me and  
make me pregnant.

you say it sounds pretty womanly to you, huh?  
but uterus-ovary- fallopian-tubularouses & baby-making organ stuff  
are not what makes me a woman.

No, my womanhood is an identity defined through my own  
experiences  
expressions  
choices  
and freedoms.  
it's un-dictated by biological-scientific & frankly-complicated-terminologies--  
that we all learned in middle (white washed) school awkwardly boxed together

while

puberty made dotted sweat race courses, hominess went buck wild  
and anatomy lessons gave us chances to giggle about  
SEX

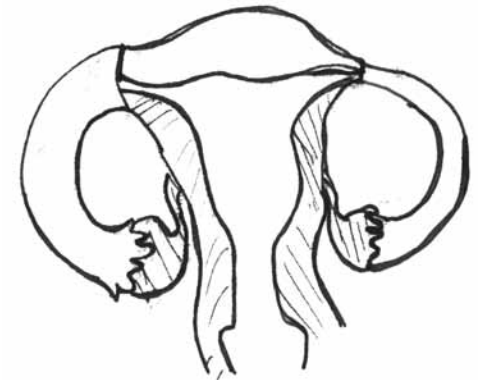
we all knew about it from the internet porn  
while classroom  
flashcards told us what  
a man is and what a woman is.

but since when does genitalia have to be seen as such a  
flawless determinate of gender?  
I don't need any state, textbook, or doctor telling me what my gender is.

My privilege as a person whose genitalia "matches"  
womanly-like mannerisms spares me the day to day struggle of gender outlawing incarcerating so  
many in my community  
but I'm furious that  
cis-genderism, creeps like ivy up decaying walls of compulsory gender assignment surgeries society  
over-prescribes.  
let's start considering that  
womanhood, manhood, personhood, queerhood, transhood, ze/hirhood,  
is a personal matter.

stop pathologizing bodies  
that are bravely resisting  
traditional gender norms  
crazed by genitalia behavioral alignment frenzies---  
because we're all people.

I want to see less  
female-izing  
male-izing  
and more human-izing.



# NULI

→ WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO FRIDA SIF  
BY CHARA TREKAPOS

①



Nuli existed. As simple as that.

②



Nuli could not choose between male and female identity. Zhe\* tried to be a boy. Looked like that.

③



Then, zhe tried to be a girl. Looked like that.

④



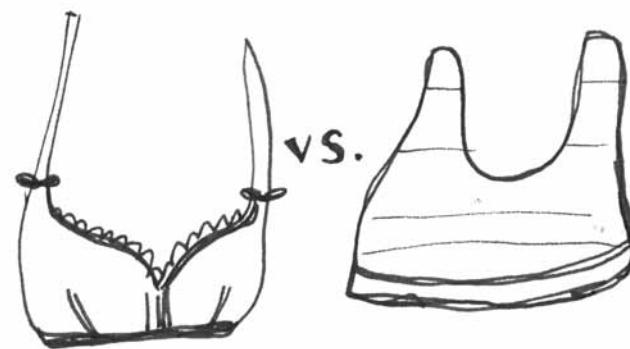
Zhe always felt like that. And always bad about zhimself. When Nuli was 30, zhe killed zhimself. Still feeling like that, unable to find the right look.

# Gender Variance

BY WALLACE WATCHOWSKI

You wake up in the morning and you debate whether to make an effort today. You know you shouldn't wear your sports bra so much, you pull it too tight and you're getting a rash. You decide to wear an ordinary bra instead, but all of a sudden, you feel awkward. You change back, and even if you feel more comfortable, you are still assumed to be female. Three times that you notice. Twice you correct them. You get one apology and one complete lack of acknowledgement. Today, like every day, you feel like a faker and a coward for not speaking up to the ones who intimidate you. And when your mother asks 'What's wrong?' You lie and say nothing, because what can you say? You know if you say, "They called me she." She'll be embarrassed because you know she's embarrassed by your identity, so you don't say anything; you go to class and you forget the incident and you feel braver every time you say 'I'm not a girl.'

Once, you read a story about a woman who died on the sidewalk. She was homeless, and when she went to a shelter, they turned her away because of the way her body curved and did not curve. She was stoic, she slept on the sidewalk rather than go to a men's shelter. You read this and you panic, your body goes into chaos mode and the derealization sets in and you're so scared and so sad, for her and for yourself, even though that's not fair, no one's really going to kill you, are they, stop martyring yourself. It's these words you think to yourself, and yet, the statistics say different. It's scary and surreal to think that one day, your moment of bravery could leave you dead in a ditch.



# my GENDER

BY CREATRIX T/AR4

My gender isn't really mine to determine  
 My gender is more a job description than a role  
 My gender is largely dependent on whoever has to deal with me  
 My gender is more about who I am not than who I am  
 My gender can only ever exist as a social de-construct  
 My gender is only an issue because everyone else makes it an issue  
 My gender greatly prefers to let it all hang out rather than bind it all in  
 My gender wants to get rid of the hormones that sink me into despair once a month like clockwork lunacy  
 My gender scoffs at the idea of "submissive Asians" because have you seen my mum and aunts?!  
 Even the quiet ones will kick your ass (or feed you. or both.)  
 My gender has far less skincare products or designer clothes than my dad  
 My gender asked Lush HQ if they would consider opening a branch in Malaysia because my dad fell in love with the henna blocks he uses to dye his moustache (they said no)  
 My gender clinged to the honorific Mx at age 14  
 My gender was way more comfortable with ambiguity as a teenager compared to my sexuality - and now it's flipped around  
 My gender was walking around my aunt's apartment complex in Dhaka in a khameez top and jeans when a 5-year-old asked me: "tumi akta chele na akta mei?" (are you a boy or a girl?)  
 My gender gets me assigned to the Foreigner contingent at my cousin's wedding to a French guy  
 My gender is sorely tempted to come out on my family-safe Facebook profile if it wasn't so futile  
 My gender shows too much cleavage for my mum's comfort no matter what I wear  
 My gender is "losing my dignity" by "exposing myself to strange men" (try strange \*women\*, mum)  
 My gender connected to Chatroulette and the first comment was "oh, just some random Black guy"  
 My gender showed up at an event in a hat with playing cards- and then showed up on twitter as "so there is this guy here who's dressed as a magician...he looks good!"  
 My gender gets really bothered by being called "he" even when wearing a men's shirt, a moustache,  
 and a playing-card hat  
 My gender gets femmespiration from Darren Hayes and Joan Jett  
 My gender is not likely to be in a Saint Haridans suit or a rockabilly dress with skull hairbows  
 My gender prefers the Alternative Lifestyle Haircut to feminine long hair, but resents the unspoken requirement to look queer enough  
 My gender goes neutral around straight cis guys but makes me want to be a lady around dapper gentlequeers  
 My gender floats between a super femme girlfriend and a soft butch lover  
 My gender feels pressured to be queer enough to prove my sexual orientation  
 My gender, like my name and religion and ethnicity and sexuality and politics and nationality, is

wrong

My gender is femme by default and yet not at all feminine  
 My gender cannot conform but is not particularly unusual  
 My gender feels are irrelevant once I leave the Bay Area  
 My gender is forcibly fluid  
 My gender's only consistent quality is Foreign  
 My gender gets a failing grade despite my extra credit  
 My gender is Fill In The Blank  
 My gender is fucked  
 My gender is fucked over  
 My gender is Fuck You  
 My gender is F.



# ON BEING GENDERLESS

BY CHRISSY COLLIGAN

Try not to think of yourself as an empty vessel where something has been left missing, but rather as a universe. Primordial and infinite; forever expanding to match supernovas with your heart and star light in your veins. The cosmos needs no name for 'create' or 'destroy' or even a form to inspire awe. Constellations, like borders and bodies, are made of imaginary lines.

# GENDER QUEER

BY JAY FENSON

It's french class and we're practicing modifying adjectives.

"Fille. Fille. Garcon. Fille..."

The teacher paces the room, pointing at students. "Girl, boy, you see the gender difference and you need to change the adjective accordingly," He states, albeit in French.

"Garcon, fille..." He reaches my desk and I tense.

"Fille," he says and continues on with his example.

Girl.

What else was I expecting? Regardless of clothes, voice, presentation- I'm a girl.

Just like that it's picked for me.

It feels so heavy to have to carry the label around. It's like how in elementary my teachers would always spell my last name with an extra N: too small a mistake to be acknowledged and changing nothing about me. Yet it always feels so out of place.

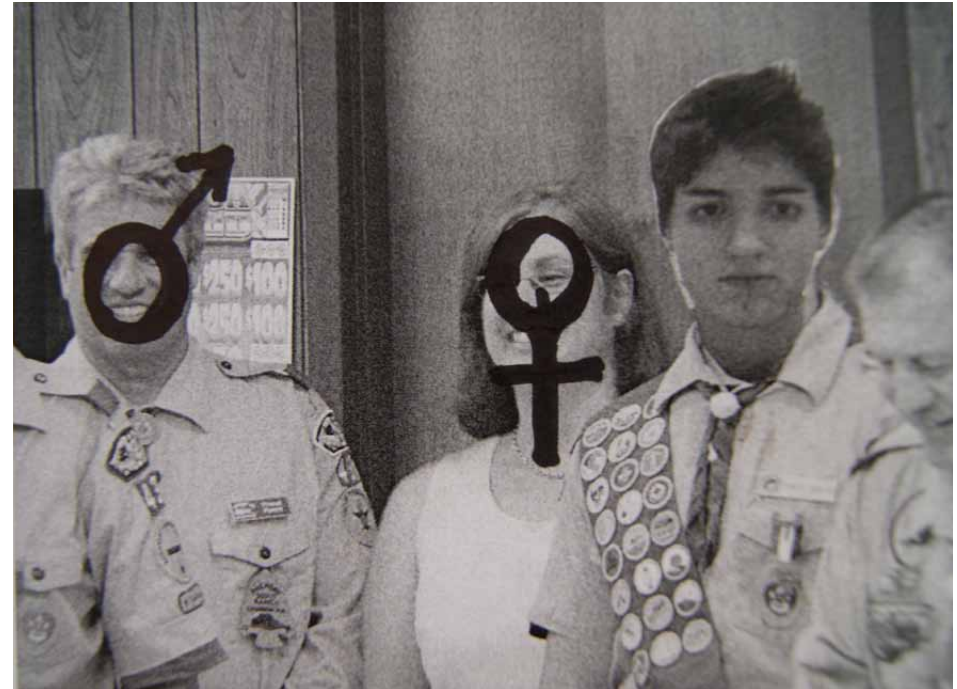
I've taken to only using the restroom in emergency and whenever I know no one else will be there. Because when I glance at the restroom sign or see a person walk in I think, I'm in the wrong one. But both are wrong.

I don't belong.

And I never use the restroom in French. Because I'd rather wait the hour and a half than carry that stupid hall pass with the triangle-dress stick figure and the unnecessary word: Fille.

Girl.

Je ne suis pas une fille.  
Je ne suis rien. ♀



# BOY SCOUTS

BY AMANDA BLYTH

# STILL BIRTH

BY BROSISTER PHOENIX

I was complete when I was still inside,  
in suspended animation among the thickest viscous atmosphere,  
dwelling in the cavity of another's pelvis

I was not yet a girl

Just a pearl inside my mother's oyster,  
cloistered from the influence of propriety  
Society's cold grip had yet to fit it's mitts around my tits and label me "she"  
so I was free

But ambiguity is a lump in the throats of our creators,  
a spasm caught between a swallow and a wretch, if  
and their heads won't rest until they know whether to be proud or disappointed

They forced the knot from within them in ultrasonic scream at my mother's belly  
They yelled at me "What are you?!"  
And while my body bounced back an intact image of their own humanity,  
what was seen was just an empty space in the place where a penis might be  
and just like that...  
my identity was pre-arranged and married off to the gender assigned me

And as I slipped out of my amniotic cocoon,  
I left behind my castrated power,  
and my mother's son was flushed from her body like the abortion it was-  
so much of my inherent worth...  
floating in the aftermath of my own bloody afterbirth

So I shaved and I preened  
and learned to embrace demeaning sex as I searched for my missing member,  
surrendering the last traces of my dignity every time I opened my legs,  
all the while begging for the respect I was proving I didn't deserve  
and unwittingly cursing myself with the perverse sense of validation I received

Believe you me, when I say I was sick,  
stuck in a vicious cyclical psychological trip

all in the pursuit of my stolen dick

# THE MONSTERS UNDER MY SHIRT & IN MY HEAD

BY BINARY FROG

I had always known something was a little bit off, although I could never put my finger on what.

I am biologically female and I identify as genderfluid. For me, genderfluid means that my gender changes from male to female or female to male, depending on the day. Some days I'm neither, some days I'm both, but I almost always present myself as female. I've only left the house with a packer (a fake flaccid penis) on twice, and both times I was scared shitless that someone would notice and say something like, "That's not a boy..."

It's weird being so... "non-binary" as one of my friends would put it. What will I be today? How do I tell people to use correct pronouns? Should I just ignore it? Does it look like I have a boner? The list of questions goes on and on and on, and it is a constant worry.

Added on to the stress of my gender identity, I also have to worry about school. Being a freshman in college is no easy task, especially in a community college that lacks any sort of GSA or LGBTQ+ group. Most of my friends at school have no idea about my gender identity, and they probably never will, which definitely adds to the stress....

I guess this is the point in my little essay... letter... thing... where I say what gender means to me. I'll say this plainly: it doesn't. Gender is another way of sorting people and pigeon holing them. In some ways this is good, in other ways this is bad. It just kind of... is. It exists, and probably always will. There I go rambling again... Perhaps I need to drink less coffee.

My advice? Stay strong, demand you be called by proper pronouns, and never lose faith. Who knows? Maybe the gods will smile down on you.







STONE ALONE: TRANS ON THE 8<sup>TH</sup> OF MARCH  
BY GEORGE EMORY JUGE

## Self Summation BY LEX MAPES

i like it when strangers sir me  
i like it when i accidentally talk about being a dad one day in front of people who assume  
i've always wanted to be a mom  
i like being referred to as handsome  
i don't feel that i'll ever be a man due to the fact that i'm okay with residing within a  
perpetual state of boy  
i don't think i'll ever follow through with t, i'm caught in between pronouns and i'm  
oddly okay with it  
i identify the most with male but i don't identify wholly with either  
i like being told i'm a good boyfriend  
i absolutely fucking loathe when people say "hey, girls!" or "bye, ladies!" when i'm in  
a group of female friends  
i like my backwards hat  
i like my motorcycle  
i like kissing her with the sun full on my bare back  
i like the way she smooths my lapels  
i like how her fingertips brush my hairline  
i like that she's my girl  
i like that she helped me realize that i'm so so good at being her boy  
i like it all





# HOW YOU READ ME VS. WHO I AM

BY L/AM MARTIN

I have been, for as long as I can remember, a "gender transgressor." From the time I was very young I rejected the gender roles assigned to me and did everything I could to realign myself with the roles and presentation I desired. I may have been born male-bodied but I certainly did not wish to be "a boy". I'm sure there were a lot of influences that contributed to the manifestation of my desires and emerging identity but

they weren't comprehensible to me then. All I knew is that I wanted to be one of the girls; wearing gowns, playing house, trotting around with dolls, and anything else from which I was unceremoniously excluded.

I dedicated long hours to femme-play and to developing my identity around all things fabulous. This did not go over well with my father, a rural farmer. I was fortunate to be very bright and talented, and to have a family that saw me as "gifted." So my eccentricities got a pardon throughout most of my young-childhood. Then, when I was around the age of 10 or 11 things changed. My father realized that he didn't (and would probably never) have the little boy/man he had always dreamed about. His son wasn't a dirt-loving, hard working farm-boy like he had been. So, in what I can only imagine to be sincere desperation, he began to heavily police my gender expression. He demanded that I "act like a man," "quit being a sissy," and "not act like such a flabby little queen." He was no stranger to body-shaming either.

This constant berating from my father was what I remember to be my first major struggle with gender policing and realizing the difference between who I am/how I view myself, and how others view me/what expectations they have of my identity and presentation. As a wee child I did not understand the vast complexity of gender identity, sex, and sexuality. I felt that an alignment with femininity must make me a girl. My "boy" body was really a "girl" body in disguise. It was very problematic for me. Though, I was always defiant; refusing to assimilate into "normal boy-hood." This was made all the more complicated as I began to feel sexual attraction to male bodies.

As I grew into my teenage years and my sexuality developed, my personal body issues coalesced with my gender-struggles and my confusion deepened. I felt rejected by both the "hetero-masculine" and the "homo-masculine." I felt my fat and shapely body was more easily accepted as feminine. But I also felt pressure from family and society to be male. I wanted to parade around in heels and dresses. I wanted to be invited to the slumber parties with the girls. But I felt rejection from all established normativity. Don't even get me started on how I feared and abhorred the body hair I was devastated to find taking root.

I loved indulging in femininity behind closed doors. But it was always in private. I feared reprisals. My father had taught me that. As I continued to struggle and meet others who were struggling my understanding of myself shifted. I went from baggy black clothes to actively gender-fucking. It made me feel so good to paint my nails, grow my hair out, and dress and attempt to be read as androgynous. It thrilled me when folks would address me with female pronouns, however accidental. It was during these high school gender-fucking years that I started to gravitate toward this idea I had been

hearing about from a friend... GenderQueer. I had already been introduced to LGBT liberation, Trans\*identity, and gender-bending, but now I had found a place that seemed completely right for me. Folks like Judith Butler, Riki Wilchins, James Saint James, MATTilda, and a slew of fabulous G.Queer activist and performers welcomed me with open arms to a world of active transgression. Suddenly my identity had purpose. And my rejection of masculinity and body-politics had finally found me a home.



Attending university deepened my love of GenderQueer politics and philosophy. Queer Theory was my domain, and I was a master (at least among the hordes of uninformed). I became thoroughly comfortable being GenderQueer... I loved making people question my gender/sex. I began to play a lot harder with gender roles; actively trying to manipulate the social landscape based on the expectations and reactions of others. It was during this time that my fear of masculinity began to abate. I lost weight and my body became much more recognizably masculine. I stopped shaving my face and chest. I started to feel that my natural body was beautiful. And my gender identity began to shift from an outlaw position to a player in a game. I started to enjoy the physicality of my body, the potential of my penis, and the pleasure/power of which both are capable. Suddenly, the masculinity that I had always rejected seemed the avenue to sex... Or at least the kind of sex porn had been teaching me to desire.

My world turned upside down. At first I worried that I was betraying my identity and ideologies. I felt a traitor to all Gender non-conformists. But then I realized that the heart of a GenderQueer identity is freedom from expectation-. It is the ability to fluidly create your own gender identity and presentation. It is freedom from the static demands of the status quo. Now I inhabit a much more masculine presence, mostly for social ease. This is a huge privilege for me: to feel comfortable presenting as male and to be easily read as such. It is something I'm still getting used to. I feel a constant demand to check myself and the privilege of masculinity. I've never been much for misogyny or patriarchy nor for normative gender roles. It thrills me to think that I can queer people's understand... or just disrupt it, by appearing so masculine at the outset but being so... different when my mouth opens.

Interestingly, I'm now finding myself being policed in new ways. Because I no longer regularly present as visibly GenderQueer I find myself silenced when trying to navigate more queered spaces. Folks charge me with cis-privilege... which on one level is totally legit. I do have the privilege of being read as male. But on a deeper level, I am still very GenderQueer, just ask my friends who see me swish around in sequined gowns and flowing scarves. I still fear reprisals so my gender transgression is mostly relegated to private spaces. Though I do try to queer my appearance in smaller ways. I'm still on a journey toward authenticity. Right now my goal is radical self-love. And I've been feeling rather successful in that regard.

# GENDER FEELS

BY VICKI JOY

I hate gender. I hate the binary gender system. I hate that gender is a thing that needs to be established and explored and discussed.

I don't remember the context of the conversation, but a few months ago my girlfriend said, "something, something, cis-gender something something." My immediate response of, "I don't know, I'm not cis-gender," confused, I think, the both of us. We've had several half-conversations about it since then, but I've basically refused to actually discuss it. It's weird to talk about, even though I've devoted so much time to thinking about it. I don't consider myself trans\*, but cis\* doesn't seem to fit me, either. I'm just genderqueer. It's true that there are more vests and bowties than skirts in my wardrobe...but there are skirts in my wardrobe. I answer to "sir" or "ma'am" and don't care much about which one people use; it's when they try to correct themselves or outright ask which one I am that bothers the shit out of me.

A lot of people, I think, are under the impression that female-bodied people who wear male clothing are inherently uncomfortable with their bodies. This isn't true for me; I actually thoroughly enjoy my body. Everything I do that is deemed masculine, I simply see as logical. When I'm cold, a button down and bow-tie with a vest and grampa sweater is the perfect amount of layering to keep me warm. I've always preferred jobs that involve physical labor, but it's not because I'm "butch," it's actually because I'm lazy. Who wants to sit at a desk all day and then go to the gym when you can work out at work? My wallet goes in my pocket and my keys on a carabiner because I'm absent-minded and lose things if they aren't attached to me.

# LIMINALITY

BY MORGAN HAVEN-TIETZE

Liminality comes from a word that means "a threshold." In anthropology, it refers to the middle stage of rituals when you've shed your old status but have not yet attained your new one. You're in limbo. You're on the verge of something.

It's the moment in a voyage when you've left one continent for another and have just lost sight of shore. You turn to face into the wind, toward your destination, but you're not there yet. You are here, on the moving sea, which is not where you were and not where you are going. Liminality can be disorienting.

It's strange, to be defined simply as "between." You are not x and you are not y. Not female and not male. Not gay and not straight. Not pie and not cake. Which can leave you feeling like nothing. Like you are nowhere.

Nowhere sometimes means Utopia, though. Since you're nowhere, you get to make the rules. You get to decide. Order dissolves into fluidity. Land gives way to waves. There is no gender binary, no conversational script, no dress code. My hairy legs don't matter. My incomplete beard is the new fashion. My stretch marks are badges of honor. The tuft of hair that has sprung up between my breasts is my pride and joy. After a childhood, decades, a whole life of hiding, I can finally take off my shirt to feel the sun. To be not or, but and.

Liminality ends when you decide to accept where you are. On a ship, going somewhere. You'll get there eventually. And in the meantime, extend the invitation: You, whoever you are. Come join me. Let's go together.



# GENDERQUEER UNEARTHED BY GIZMO

"Can you call my grandfather? He could come pick me up." The school nurse had caved yet again and was letting me go home. I don't remember why I was faking sick this time. Maybe it was that day in sex ed when the teacher claimed some girls have more testosterone than "normal." These girls might have lower voices, she explained, provoking a lot of snickers and pointed fingers in my direction. When Grandpa pulled up in the Cadillac I slid across the leather passenger seat, relieved, but still trying to keep up the sick act.

Bullshit was Grandpa's native language so of course he knew I was full of it. He played along and we made some small talk on the way home. I mentioned that his new puppy, Max, wasn't all that obedient. "Well," he replied, "that's because Max isn't old enough to understand English." I nodded. I knew that. Grandpa smirked his wry smile, the same smile I smirk when someone believes a total bullshit story I tell them.

Gender is a concept that never made sense to me. I was born into an androgynous body and mind, in rural America in the 80s. From the get go I wanted to be a boy. I dressed like a boy, except when my mom forced me into dresses for church. I played exclusively with boys and carried myself like a boy. I was confused when my dad wouldn't let me take my shirt off to play basketball. I wanted very, very badly to be a Boy Scout. More than anything I remember wanting to be my grandfather. He was always so put together; I remember him in brown slacks, a striped oxford and a tie, complete with a chained tie bar. He didn't speak much, but had this way of making you believe anything he said. While I was just being myself my childhood peers were noticing that I wasn't the same as

they were. Later, my parents realized it wasn't a "tomboy phase" that was going to go away. I was a lone queer in a small town. By the time I met other queers I was a teenager and already convinced that something was wrong with me. I was a defective straight girl who was too aggressive, wore the wrong clothes and had breasts that required a pushup bra to be suitable. And dating? I understood as much about dating as Max the dog did about English. I never had feelings for the boys I dated. I just assumed it was some kind of defect, just like my masculine traits.

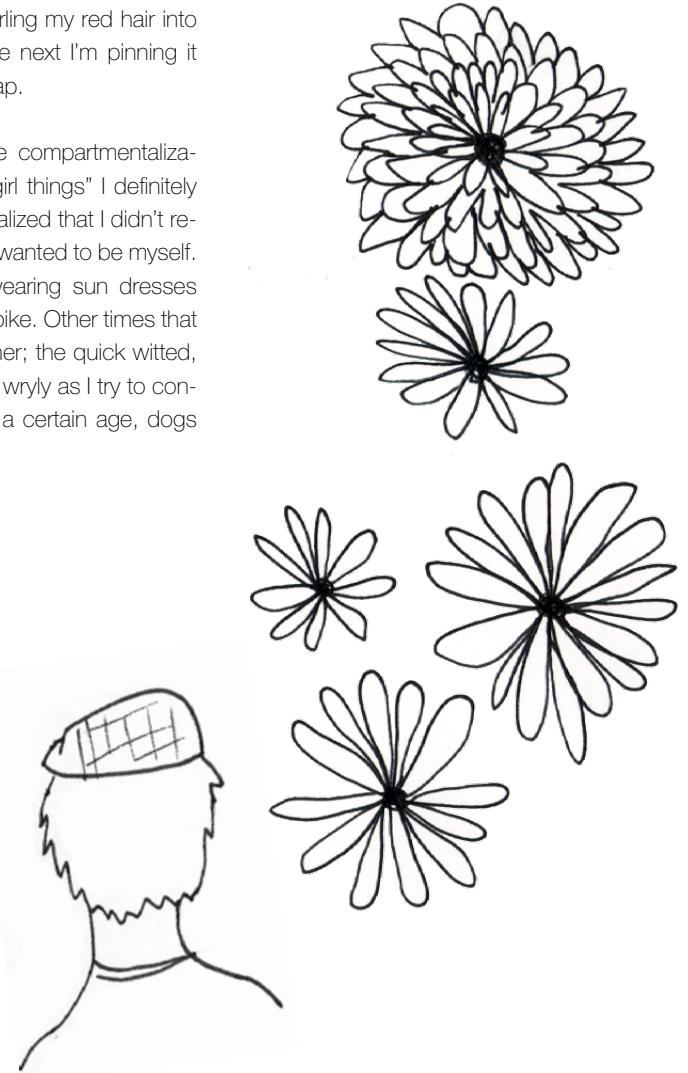
I tried to modify my behavior, my clothes. I tried religion, graduate school and getting married to a man. The whole time it never felt right. It was like one of those old TVs, the kind where you had to turn the dial to the channel you wanted. Sometimes, if you were between the channels you could make out some form of a picture, but you couldn't quite get it. I just never quite got myself.

Until I stopped blaming myself. In the heartbreak of divorce I realized that I had a very major self-esteem problem. I resolved to face the blame I'd laid on myself as a child growing up in a place where being genderqueer was unacceptable. The more I began to unearth the person I had buried alive the more validation I received. Both men and women were attracted to me. I found out that I did have those "feelings" after all, just not with guys! My family noticed that suddenly, my witty quips had returned, and they were seeing a lot more of that wry smile.

It has only been in the last few months that I've uncovered the genderqueer part of my identity. I feel like a mixture of Rainbow Brite and HeMan,

soaring through the sky on the back of Falcor. The disaster that was my attempt at flirting has been replaced by the witty, charming mojo that resides in the masculine part of my personality, right alongside the tender, soft feminine part. And my small breasts? They're perfectly sized to let me slide between masculine and feminine with ease. One day I'm curling my red hair into bouncy long locks and the next I'm pinning it into a bun under my ball cap.

As a child, faced with the compartmentalization of "boy things" and "girl things" I definitely wanted to be a boy. I've realized that I didn't really want to be a boy, I just wanted to be myself. Sometimes that means wearing sun dresses and riding my pink cruiser bike. Other times that means being my grandfather; the quick witted, dapper gentleman, smiling wryly as I try to convince a pretty lady that at a certain age, dogs understand English.



# M/W

BY LEE DWYER

the stamp from last night's bar is  
still visible on the back of my hand:  
a capital 'W'  
slanted sideways—or is that an 'M'—  
the student grabs my hand, tight  
in his six-year-old grasp, stares  
at the letter, and asks  
what's that for  
miss?

miss  
sir  
mister  
are you a boy or a girl?  
you look like a boy  
you got short hair like a boy, but  
miss  
mister  
what are we supposed to call you  
what are we  
what are you

it's on the tip of my tongue, to say to him  
hell, kid, I wish I knew  
had a letter stamped on me at birth  
like my skin was so much paper  
easy to read, to fold  
got another letter inked on my hand  
but it's a temporary tattoo, smearing  
in his tiny grip  
and fading fast  
maybe I oughta get it made  
permanent, dig needles in under  
the surface of my skin like serifs

miss  
mis-ter  
sir you're  
not supposed to go  
in there

well I need to piss  
and the letter on the door says this  
is the room I'm supposed to  
do it in  
gotta show an ID to  
join the VIP club of people allowed  
to piss safely  
so maybe I'll hit up a tattoo parlor, get  
this handstamp made permanent  
engrave the letter so dark and bold, even  
Comic Sans will back away from it  
in a dark alley  
spell it out so everybody  
can read me clearly, won't have  
to second-guess my allegiance  
slide second glances over my skin like  
sweat under summer sun  
and the armor of a binder

but then

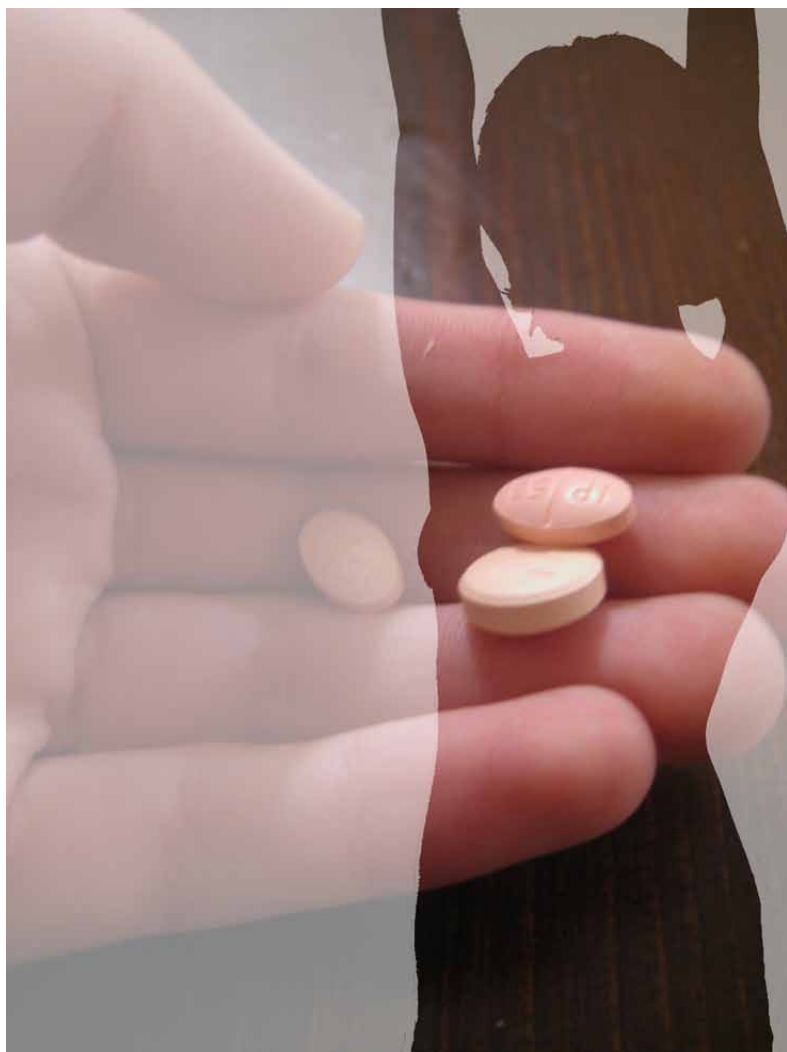
at the party  
she grabs my hand  
in the kitchen, holds it tight and asks me  
what letters I prefer  
whether she can get my number  
and whether I'd like to see her  
sometime  
for an answer, I stamp a kiss  
onto her lips, engrave it  
so she doesn't need to question  
leave and carry her glance  
her touch  
with me, let letters fade  
away from skin

# SLUGGER

BY LEE DWYER

sweat trickle down  
my neck, prickle  
down my chest, tickle between  
breasts pressed  
tight like armor to protect  
this pageboy attempt  
at playing a knight  
wishing someone nobler would  
lay a sword flat on each shoulder  
--maybe slice twice a little lower—  
and entitle me  
forever "sir"

I can see the next slugger step up  
bat to shoulder, bigger  
than I'll ever get, sleeves snugger  
around his biceps  
and nothing on his chest  
but a jersey number  
I feel jealousy rise from slumber  
feel sweat itch down my back  
--then hear a crack  
white dot rising to greet the sky  
it's been missing  
as my heart pounds inside  
a breast-plated chest  
hope I can snag it, knock that slugger  
back to his bench  
show him you don't have to  
be a knight to  
complete a quest



## Essence of Femininity

BY QUEEN SICYPHUS

I am not sure yet where on the gender spectrum I would place myself, but I have never been quite comfortable with the way my feminine body physically portrays my gender. This piece began as a nude photo shoot in my bedroom-- a therapeutic exploration of my physical self. The pills added are the antidepressants I began taking at age 13. For a long while, I viewed both my depression and my complicated relationship with gender as things needing to be "fixed" about me, but I have been working to teach myself about self-acceptance, and I have come to discover that while my femininity is not the only defining part of me, it is a part of me that I can accept.

## THE INBETWEENS

BY ASA FORSYTHE

A lot of people get that gender has all sorts of variations, and that the ends of the "gender spectrum" might not even be "feminine" and "masculine." Gender is a freaking complex thing with all sorts of dynamic interactions between culture, genetics, environment, psychology, etc. But in our day-to-day lives a lot of us still unconsciously fall back on that simplified binary of ladies and dudes along with a vague gray area of "in-betweens" or something.

This isn't complex enough to accurately communicate people's lived experience of gender, though. There's a lack of language at hand, I think, and people need common language to communicate efficiently, effectively, and, above all, truthfully.

I'm 24 now, and it's only in the last three years or so that I've come into my identity as gender-queer, and it took me so long, I think, precisely because I lacked that language, that intuitive understanding of the "in-between" of gender. Most of all, it took me a very long time to separate sexual preference/orientation and gender. I am attracted to women and I am biologically male, so how could I be anything but a man?

As I grew into myself, I began to question the purpose and origins of gender expectations and inequities, especially the rejection of those who don't fit into the strict binary. As light grew between me and the standard account of gender, I finally asked myself "who am I" first and only then did I consider what that might label me as in other people's eyes. As far as a label goes, I would call myself two-gender, third-

gender, gender-nonconforming, and/or gender-queer, and my preferred pronoun is "they." These don't capture my feelings entirely, of course, but they help to fill in that language gap.

I have had a relatively easy time of it in exploring my gender. I don't have a story of struggle, self-loathing, or rejection. In part, that's because I haven't taken many chances. I've only told a few of my friend that I prefer "they" to "he," and I've only gone out in a dress twice, both times without incident. But I never feel as comfortable and sexy as I do in a dress (I happen to have a body that works well for that), and it stinks not feeling comfortable wearing the clothes I love best in 90% of the time.

Once you have resolutely rejected the gender binary, you see its overbearing presence everywhere, but it need not be that way. The wikipedia page on third-gender systems (and fourth- and fifth-) has many examples of societies incorporating some of that 'in-between' of gender and so providing some of that language that we're missing. My own path has led me to the in-between as well, and I hope that what I've figured out for myself has the possibility of contributing to the same project.

# PRONOUNS

PHOTOS BY EDDIE RICH





## UNTITLED

BY BROOK RHYMES

When I was little, I wanted to be a warrior. I wanted to lug my bag onto my shoulders, tie a sword to my hip, walk into the hills as I fought goblins and orcs and slayed dragons, and then I would bring my loot home and sell it and tell wonderful stories. I wanted to be a superhero, I wanted to fight evil and save the day and have a woman swoon in my arms as I saved her. I wanted to be a gangster, I wanted to be a firefighter, I wanted to be a rock star, I wanted to be a cop.

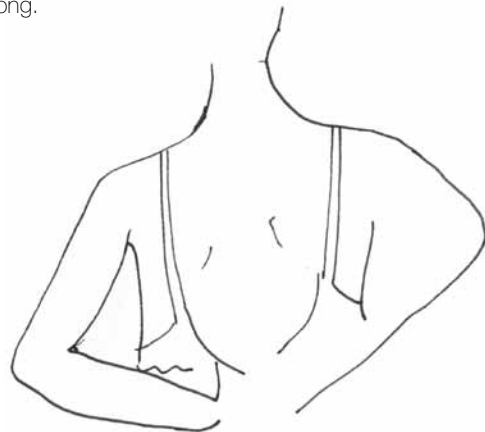
I wanted action figures and superhero suits and a name people would flinch at, because I wanted to be a BAMF gunslinger. I playfought and dug up worms and played pranks and pretended to be king and watched generally male cartoons; my favourite cartoon, even now, is Avengers; Earth's Mightiest Heroes. No, seriously. I have such a boner for Loki.

But I digress. They gave me dolls. They gave me dresses. They told me I should settle down and have kids. I should watch My Little Pony and Princesses. And it was all wrong. All because I was born with a vagina, not a penis.

And I still feel this way. Even now, I know it's wrong. My brain doesn't match my body and I have to bind breasts too big to flatten properly. My mother gave me dirty looks when I decided to sneak two packs of boxer shorts into my clothes shopping. My nan tells me I should wear girly things and grow my hair out. And every suggestion makes me cringe because it's wrong.

Kids in my school have always accused me of being a man; and they're right, even if they think it's insulting. Despite the fact my body is feminine inside I feel like a man. I feel like the male architecture fits me much more comfortably than the female one. It doesn't fit totally, of course, but who does fit comfortably into gender stereotypes?

I just wish how I felt wouldn't be seen as so wrong.



A Poem

BY SARA WHITTINGTON

can i please just fucking throw up all the loneliness and isolation and sadness out of my system,  
just to revel a pink empty inside -  
but it's worth it for those 30 seconds of heat and cold and adrenaline and release of the pain of  
feeling alone in this world,  
no matter what your brain tells you, you always feel alone;  
no matter how often you cry, you always feel sad;  
because you need more love in your life,  
more acceptance,  
more understanding and  
fuck sympathy i need some empathy in my life - i need someone who says  
"yes, i've been through this and boy, i can't tell you how badly it sucks."  
We don't even have to be best friends -  
just someone who won't look at me funny,  
or ask me why i'm wearing a dress today,  
or what pronoun they should use, after i say 'none'  
because this fucked up world is revolving on an axis that is a binary:  
north and south,  
male and female,  
and i am neither,  
i am none,  
i am all,  
i am wishing on a star that is only shining so brightly because it blew up a little while ago, and  
don't we all want to be shining so brightly, but no one wants to explode.  
The dream i had last night about you gave me a crick in my neck -  
my shoulders were up to my ears,  
my lungs were drowning in the fear that you left and i couldn't find you because you were being  
stubborn and baby,  
i'm not sure if i want to find you,  
i'm not sure if you want to be found,  
i want to dig a hole in the ground and bury my sorrows and feel my lungs fill with air,  
and instead of weeping,  
i would begin to smile.

# THE STRUGGLES OF GETTING READY

BY MIKEY COOK



NEXT ISSUE:

# RADICAL SELF LOVE

Contribute to us at **[thebanditzine@gmail.com](mailto:thebanditzine@gmail.com)**

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